

The last word

John Hess, award for activism

John Hess, our co-editor since we started *Jump Cut* in 1974, has recently won an award by the New Faculty Majority (NFM), the leading organization seeking justice and equality for contingent faculty in higher education. As many in the United States now know, about two thirds of the classroom teachers in the U.S. academic world are working on limited contracts without the stability of any future security. Covered by different terms, including *lecturer, non-tenure-track, contingent, part-time, adjunct, visiting, temporary*, etc., these people teach most of the courses and most of the students in higher education today. John has been a pioneer in working for better conditions for such teachers and for gaining contractual fairness within faculty unions and with college and university employers. We're proud of John's achievement and quote the NFM press release below

Chuck Kleinhans
Julia Lesage

On November 17, 2014, what would have been our colleague and friend Steve Street's 59th birthday, NFM selected the first recipient of the Steve Street Award for Extraordinary Faculty Activism: JOHN HESS.

We invite you to read Joe Berry's eloquent statement below about John. The NFM Award Committee believes that the depth and breadth of John's work, carried out tirelessly across decades, merits recognition not only because of its quality and courage, but also because it is fitting for us to recognize those who have made the adjunct faculty movement possible. Like Steve, John's commitment to his teaching and scholarship has been as deep as his commitment to his activism. Like Steve, John has worked collectively and collaboratively within organizations and unions but has never been afraid to challenge them to do and be better.

Along with so many faculty working in contingent positions, John's work can only be characterized as "extraordinary"—all the more so for the extraordinarily challenging obstacles that he and all contingent faculty have faced and continue to face in order to serve their students and the profession

of teaching. We at NFM believe that it is important to remember that the momentum that has been building steadily since our founding could only be happening because of the tireless work of people like John, whose work dates back decades.

As Joe Berry has put it:

“John is probably the single individual most responsible, though certainly not alone, for the development of what many believe (including me) is the best collective bargaining agreement covering contingent faculty in the USA, negotiated by the California Faculty Association NEA/AAUP/SEIU [National Education Association/American Association of University Professors/Service Employees International Union], with the California State University system. He also has been active on the national stage: doing organizing trainings at COCAL [Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor, a three-country body—United States, Canada, Mexico—that sponsors a conferences every other year and also has a number of there projects on behalf of contingent academic labor], writing for AAUP’s *Academe* and co-authoring a chapter in the recent book *Equality for Contingent Faculty* (edited by Keith Hoeller) and, until his recent debilitating illness, had been an active participant on ADJ-L [ADJ-L is the COCAL list serve; name came from pre-COCAL name, Adjunct List] and, for a time, on the COCAL International Advisory Committee. He is currently engaged, with Joe Berry and Helena Worthen, in writing a book on the story of the lecturers’ [the name for Non-Tenure-Track faculty in the California State University system] struggle and how they achieved their present conditions.

John's contributions to the contingent faculty movement reach from the 1970's, when he started teaching at San Francisco State U in the Film Studies department in 1978. He was a wonderful teacher. (Personal note: I was a student of his in his first year teaching there when I was finishing my own MA.) Equally important, he quickly became a leading activist in the Part Time and Temporary Faculty committee of the United Professors of California, and its SFSU local, rising by 1981 to be the statewide chair as well as often leading the committee at SFSU. [UPC, United Professors of CA, was the other statewide union vying to represent CSU faculty. It was affiliated with AFT and was generally viewed as more progressive, militant, and pro-lecturer than CFA at the time.]

He also was the editor of the statewide lecturer's newsletter. He helped to lead the lecturers’ efforts in the first collective bargaining elections in 1981-82 while he was also involved, with other lecturers, in pushing the FTTT [full time tenure track]

leadership to be more responsive to lecturers concerns. The UPC lost the election, by a few dozen votes out of over 10,000 cast, and CFA, a smaller and non-AFL-CIO union, won largely because people who wanted no union voted for CFA. Nevertheless, John and other leaders convinced UPC activists to join CFA where they eventually took over the leadership themselves, much to the benefit of the lecturers. He continued to work to build lecturers power in CFA and rose to again become the statewide leader of the Lecturers' Council in CFA.

Like hundreds of others, John was laid off in the 90s and, having finally finished his long-delayed Ph.D., largely based upon his founding co-editorship of the renowned film (now media) journal *Jump Cut*, he took a tenure-track job at Ithaca College in NY. After five years there, John took the opportunity to avoid the tenure process and return to Oakland with his spouse, Gail Sullivan, a union staff rep and organizer.

With a monumental change to a more activist and militant leadership in 1999, with almost total unanimous lecturer support, the new leadership soon hired John to be the staff support for a revitalized and increasingly resourced Lecturers Council. It was during this period after 2000 that the lecturers came to exercise their proper leadership in CFA and helped to lead the union to great contract improvements in job security, benefits and pay equity. They also helped to lead the whole fight to save the CSU system from the corporatizing influences that accompanied the cuts in state funding that had proceeded apace since the 1980's."

John is now quite ill with Parkinson's. We wish him comfort and healing, and honor and thank him for his work. Most important, we hope that he knows that the movement to which he has given so much of his life will never forget him.

Maria Maisto

President/Executive Director, New Faculty Majority Foundation

[To top](#) [Print version](#) [JC 56](#) [Jump Cut home](#)



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